

Virginia Comprehensive Assistance Network [VA CAN] Meeting
August 31, 2006
Meeting Notes

Attendance:

Stu Neal—Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA)
Karen Cole—Co-President, Continuity First
Jim McKean—Department of Business Assistance (DBA)
Mark Slauter—Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)
Willie Miles, Jr.—Department of Minority Business Enterprise (DMBE)
Linda Hawkins—Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
Keith Boisvert—Office of Pollution Prevention, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Richard Rasmussen and Rodney Sobin—Small Business Assistance Program (SBAP), DEQ

Presentation

Mark Slauter (VDEM) and Karen Cole (Continuity First) delivered a presentation on [Disaster Preparedness for Small and Medium Businesses](#). The presentation discussed the importance of disaster planning for continuity of operations for businesses and the various steps and components of business preparedness and recovery. It was noted that such planning, or at least certain of its components, is important not only for large disasters but also for such more common events as fires, accidents, unexpected loss of key employees, and even theft and fraud. Continuity of operations planning is even legally required for certain types of companies (e.g., banks and certain other financial firms, utilities) and may be required under the Sarbanes-Oxley act for certain publicly traded companies.

The discussion noted that typically public emergency agencies focus on direct public safety priorities and restoration of public infrastructure. Little public assistance is available to help businesses during a disaster. However, Small Business Administration loans may be available after a disaster (and DBA is authorized to process certain SBA emergency assistance), though there may be significant limitations. Thus the onus is on companies to prepare themselves for disaster and develop contingencies. Companies should understand what their insurance does and does not cover (e.g., a separate flood insurance policy may be necessary and there are “business resumption insurance” products available, though they should be evaluated carefully).

Companies may be most concerned about damage to equipment, buildings, supplies, and inventory but the direct well-being of employees and their families and, thus, the availability of employees is critical. Also, firms may not consider that even if their businesses are physically unscathed in a catastrophe, their market/customers may be lost—e.g., undamaged businesses near the World Trade Center closed because of the extended period of no customer access.

It is vital for companies to back up vital records and documents and keep them offsite. A computer back-up left in the office won't help if the building is burnt or flooded.

Companies should try to hold suppliers/vendors accountable for emergency planning and should strive to buy from multiple geographically dispersed vendors to reduce vulnerability of supplies. Also, companies should try to line up disaster response products and service providers in advance to avoid the possibility of price gouging or other problems when a disaster event is imminent, in progress, or has just occurred.

Other points and links to various resources (including VDEM and FEMA) are in the presentation linked in these minutes and available via the VACAN web pages.

Roundtable

Willie Miles noted the new leadership at DMBE and that the department reports to the Secretary of Administration. There was also discussion of SWAM procurement.

Jim McKean discussed leadership changes at DBA. He noted a growing focus on state procurement, eVA electronic procurement, and SWAM emphasis. DBA has a full calendar of events.

Keith Boisvert (DEQ) noted several upcoming events, including a meeting of the Virginia Environmental Excellence Users Group (11-13 OCT, Roanoke), Energy Virginia (17-19 OCT, at VMI, Lexington), the Henrico County Energy Fair (~18-20 OCT), and the Association of Energy Conservation Professionals conference (1-2 DEC, Roanoke).

Stu Neal announced that he is leaving the Center for Entrepreneurial Development of the Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA) at the end of September. He will concentrate on similar issues in the private sector as a consultant offering training, curriculum development, and other services. He will also continue teaching as an adjunct faculty member for the CCWA.

Richard Rasmussen updated the group on the DEQ Northern Virginia Auto Body Shop Self-Certification Program and collaboration with the Washington Metropolitan Auto Body Association and Iowa Waste Reduction Center to offer demonstrations of pollution prevention and compliance techniques and equipment on 15-16 SEP in Northern Virginia.

He also brought attention to smallcompanies.com, a private sector business networking organization serving businesses in the Mid-Atlantic region (so far from York, PA to Washington, DC/Northern VA).

Next Meeting

October 24, 2006 at 10:00 AM DEQ Piedmont Regional Office.